

1 We claim:

2 1. An apparatus, comprising:

3 a body;
4 a serial number associated with the body, the serial
5 number having a plurality of order characters and a
6 plurality of unique characters;
7 a plurality of machine-readable codes on the body, each
8 encoding a portion of the serial number; and wherein
9 a first one of the codes encodes a first one of the
10 order characters, a second one of the codes encodes a second
11 one of the order characters, and the unique characters are
12 divided among and encoded by the codes following said ones
13 of the order characters.

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15 2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the codes are two-
16 dimensional array codes.

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18 3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the serial number is
19 also located on the body in human-readable form.

1 4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the order characters
2 and the unique characters are independently and sequentially
3 divided among the codes.

4 5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the body has an axis
5 and the codes are located on the body about the axis.

6 6. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the codes are laser
7 etched on the body.

8 7. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein each of the codes
9 comprises a 10x10 array of cells.

10 8. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the serial number has
11 three order characters and six unique characters, and
12 wherein there are three codes on the body, each encoding
13 three, nonsequential characters of the serial number.

1 9. An apparatus, comprising:

2 a body;
3 a serial number associated with the body, the serial
4 number having a plurality of order characters and a
5 plurality of unique characters;
6 a plurality of machine-readable, two-dimensional array
7 codes on the body, each encoding a portion of the serial
8 number such that the entire serial number is encoded on the
body; and wherein
9 a first one of the array codes encodes a first one of
10 the order characters, a second one of the array codes
11 encodes a second one of the order characters, a third one of
12 the array codes encodes a third one of the order characters,
13 and the unique characters are sequentially divided among and
14 encoded by the array codes following said ones of the order
15 characters.

16 10. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the serial number is
17 also located on the body in human-readable form.

18 11. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the body has an axis
19 and the array codes are equidistant from the axis.

12. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the array codes are
2 laser etched on the body.

3 13. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein each of the array
4 codes comprises a 10x10 array of cells.

5 14. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the serial number has
6 three order characters and six unique characters, and
7 wherein there are three array codes on the body, each
8 encoding three, nonsequential characters of the serial
9 number.

10 15. A method for encoding the serial number of an
11 apparatus, the serial number having a plurality of order
12 characters and a plurality of unique characters, the method
13 comprising:

14 (a) providing the apparatus with a plurality of machine-
15 readable codes;
16 (b) encoding one of the order characters of the serial
17 number with each of the codes; and then

1 (c) dividing and encoding the unique characters of the
2 serial number among the codes following the order characters
3 encoded in step (b).

4 16. The method of claim 15, further comprising the steps of
5 reading the codes with a machine code reader and
6 reconstructing the serial number to verify its accuracy.

7 17. The method of claim 15, further comprising the step of
8 forming the serial number on the apparatus in human-readable
9 code.

10 18. The method of claim 15 wherein steps (b) and (c)
11 comprise independently and sequentially dividing the order
12 characters and the unique characters among the codes.

13 19. The method of claim 15, further comprising the step of
14 laser etching the codes on the apparatus.

15 20. The method of claim 15 wherein step (a) comprises
16 providing three codes on the apparatus, each encoding three,
17 nonsequential characters of the serial number.

1 21. A method for encoding the serial number of an
2 apparatus, the serial number having a plurality of order
3 characters and a plurality of unique characters, the method
4 comprising:

5 (a) providing the apparatus with a plurality of machine-
6 readable, two-dimensional array codes;
7 (b) sequentially encoding one of the order characters of
8 the serial number with each of the array codes; and then
9 (c) sequentially dividing and encoding the unique
10 characters of the serial number among the array codes
11 following the order characters encoded in step (b).

12 22. The method of claim 21, further comprising the steps of
13 reading the array codes with a machine code reader and
14 reconstructing the serial number to verify its accuracy.

15 23. The method of claim 21, further comprising the step of
16 forming the serial number on the apparatus in human-readable
17 code.

18 24. The method of claim 21, further comprising the step of
19 laser etching the array codes on the apparatus.

1 25. The method of claim 21 wherein step (a) comprises
2 providing three codes on the apparatus, each encoding three,
3 nonsequential characters of the serial number.